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ABSTRACT

This publication focuses on school music programs and music education. The document features information about performance; goals of music education programs; a broader role in the curriculum for music education; the role of contemporary music; and a description of four general music courses designed by teachers. An 18-item bibliography is included. (NL)

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MUSIC EDUCATION: Experts Take New Look at Performance, General
Music

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Update

June 1990

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Music Education:

Experts Take New Look at Performance, General Music

By John O'Neil

Prize-winning orchestras and choral groups, marching bands a hundred strong or larger—these are arguably the most visible signs of music's prominence in the school program.

Ironically, the success of such groups obscures, and may even contribute to, the field's Achilles' heel: the vast number of secondary students who never participate in any formal music study. According to the U.S. Department of Education, only one student in three ever takes a music course in high school, almost exclusively in performance classes that have been attacked as overemphasizing entertainment at the expense of their educational value. And while general music lessons are standard fare for primary and middle grade students, the limited amount of time devoted to music and the number of students who need to be served by each music specialist at those levels make a comprehensive, sequenced program of music learnings difficult.

"I think the biggest issue in the field is to convince people that music is more than entertainment—it's a legitimate part of the curriculum," says John Mahlmann, executive director of the Music Educators National



Susan Fitzhugh

Conference (MENC), which has 57,000 members. Educators with diverse philosophies—from Mortimer Adler and William Bennett to Ernest Boyer and John Goodlad—share the view that music is an essential ingredient in a curriculum that helps produce culturally literate students. But accomplishing that aim has eluded many school music departments, with experts complaining that secondary programs "teach the best and forget the rest."

Still, many music educators cite reasons to be cautiously optimistic about the prospects of a stronger foothold in the curriculum. States are

increasing their support for the arts, including music, through new graduation mandates. The integration of technology in the music curriculum, efforts to build student awareness of the music of other cultures, and projects to develop sounder means of assessing student progress in music all resonate strongly outside the field and are winning support. According to Charles Hoffer, a music professor at the University of Florida and current president of MENC, such trends offer "tremendous opportunities" to enrich and expand music's role in the general curriculum. ♪

Music Education Aims for Broader Role in Curriculum

In Louise Gray's 7th grade general music class at Pittsburgh's Columbus Traditional Academy, students listen to everything from Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* to Robert Johnson's "Preachin' Blues." As part of the course focusing on contemporary composers, pupils learn to listen critically to a diverse range of music, do research projects on performers, and even build their own instruments. Through the course, students gain a vocabulary that helps them appreciate and think critically about music, says Gray. Students, some of whom otherwise experience music only on MTV and popular radio, "are more open-minded and willing to discuss" the general characteristics of

various musical styles and their own impressions of them after taking the class, she adds.

Gray's class, one of the subjects of a research project sponsored by the National Arts Education Research Center at New York University, addresses one of the key questions confronted by music educators nationwide: How can music strengthen its role in the general education of all students?

For a variety of reasons, experts on music education assert, the goal of musically literate graduates has been more strongly endorsed than supported in practice. Particularly at the secondary level, they say, programs have failed to adequately balance musical performance with strategies to help students think critically about music of different genres and styles, make sense of music history and theory, or become otherwise musically literate (see box, this page).

"I think we're still attempting to overcome the perception that the arts are either for the entertainment of the general student or for the serious study of talented students," says Richard Bell, national programs director for Young Audiences, Inc. "The great middle ground of kids—who may not be exceptionally talented but are not without ability or interest—aren't being served at all."

Window of Opportunity

While reaching out to more students and strengthening music's position in the core curriculum has been an ongoing struggle for music educators, several factors have converged to raise the stakes.

First, the school reform movement of the 1980s raised academic graduation requirements in many states, putting the squeeze on elective subjects such as music. The new mandates hit especially hard in secondary schools with a six-period day, where college-bound students, in particular, sometimes had to quit music groups for other mandated courses. As a result, music educators more than ever must seek to attract not only the most musically talented students, but also those who may have interest but no previous training.

Dan Steinel, manager of information services for the Music Educators National Conference (MENC), says music enrollments overall have not suffered during the reform era, but pockets of attrition do exist, often where six periods a day is the norm. A loss of quality to music programs is harder to prove, he says; but the exodus of talented students meant that some music directors had to face "losing the 1st clarinet, the 1st trombone, and the 1st bassoon player—and maybe that was the only bassoon player you had." Moving to a seven-period school day, says Charles Hoffer, professor of music at the University of Florida and MENC president, can "almost double enrollments in elective courses" such as music.

A second reason, also the offspring of school reforms, is the passage in many states of graduation requirements in the fine arts. In 1979, only two states mandated a course in the fine arts for graduation. Twenty-nine states now require a fine arts course, or will phase in such a requirement by 1992, according to a recent report by the National Endowment for the Arts. Although some leaders in the music education field are disappointed that some of these new graduation requirements count courses not considered as the core fine arts (music, visual arts, theatre, and dance), there is virtual unanimity that the new requirements provide a golden opportunity to reach out to more students.

Finally, an issue framing the school reform movement's adding of academic requirements—deciding what core knowledge or skills within each discipline are most worth teaching—is forcing music educators to rethink their methods and curriculums. One result has been a push within the field to tighten its offerings, by more clearly articulating course objectives, learner outcomes, student assessment, and program evaluation methods (see box, p. 3).

"Unlike other disciplines in the curriculum, music does not seem to have clearly defined, measurable objectives," asserts Donald Corbett, associate chair of the school of music at Wichita State University. Only when

What Are the Goals?

The Music Educators National Conference recommends that, as the result of a K-12 music education program, every student should:

- be able to make music, alone and with others;
- be able to improvise and create music;
- be able to use the vocabulary and notation of music;
- be able to respond to music aesthetically, intellectually, and emotionally;
- be acquainted with a wide variety of music, including diverse musical styles and genres;
- understand the role music has played and continues to play in the lives of human beings;
- be able to make aesthetic judgments based on critical listening and analysis;
- develop a commitment to music;
- support the musical life of the community and encourage others to do so; and
- be able to continue musical learning independently.

Source: *The School Music Program: Descriptions and Standards*, Music Educators National Conference, 1902 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091; \$10.50 prepaid (\$8.40 for MENC members).

For a variety of reasons, the goal of musically literate graduates has been more strongly endorsed than supported in practice.

Mark Regan

music educators ensure that music "is taught in the same rigorous, sequential, and comprehensive way that other subjects are taught," he adds, will the field enrich its curricular role.

Numerous Obstacles

Restyling music education to take advantage of the current window of opportunity faces numerous obstacles, however, most experts admit.



Experts have urged that music educators integrate preparation for performance with broad musical learning.

At the elementary level, for example, instruction in music is typically required of all students, but in many instances without adequate time to permit a

comprehensive, sequenced program. "If a math specialist saw students for 30 minutes a week, what kind of

Continued on next page

Push for Greater Clarity Draws Fire

In making a case for a broader curricular role for music education, proponents need to do a better job of specifying objectives, learner outcomes, and assessment techniques and results, numerous educators agree. Still, others see dangers in shaping music after other disciplines, saying that aesthetic outcomes of music programs are difficult to measure.

The question of how structured and measurable a music program should be has been raised anew by a move to shift the arts away from a singular focus on production (or, in the case of music, performance). The Getty Center for the Arts in Education, through its support of discipline-based arts education (DBAE), and others argue that such a move will help build enough support for the arts to increase the number of students served by balanced, general programs.

More than ever, music programs need to articulate not just what activities were completed, but what learner outcomes were reached, notes Donald Corbett of Wichita State University. "Once we define our objectives in terms of what musically educated students should know and be

able to do, we will receive the recognition and status we deserve from the education community. . . . We must start by insisting that music be taught in the same rigorous, sequential, and comprehensive way that other subjects are taught."

Student evaluation also needs to be overhauled, some experts suggest. Charles Hoffer, president of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC), says a 1987 survey conducted by the group found that only about a half of music teachers are involved in student evaluations other than giving grades. And many in the field say grades are often based heavily on attendance. "The lack of adequate evaluation hinders the development of strong music programs," Hoffer asserts. "It is difficult for music teachers to ask for more time in the school day or more funds without having some clearly specified objectives and a means of assessing the achievement of those objectives."

Others caution that in the rush to state and measure outcomes, music educators must be careful not to sacrifice the field's strengths, such as its "hands-on" nature and its potential

to motivate.

"Music is not like studying science or history," Mary Palmer, a music education professor at the University of Central Florida, says, in what has become a recurring criticism of DBAE. "We certainly don't want to take away the appeal of the subject matter" by downplaying performance. "When kids study band, they're doing it to play the instrument," adds Paul Lehman of the University of Michigan.

Robert Cutietta of Kent State University admits that music educators are "a little guilty" in not developing better means to measure student progress. But he worries that more assessment might lead to a greater emphasis on skills easily tested; note reading, for example, rather than skill in improvisation. "Music-making is the real joy of music. That can't be measured by paper and pencil."

Many think that greater clarity about music education's goals and standards of performance are essential, however, for making the field a basic subject. "Until music is approached as a discipline of knowledge, I don't think that will begin to happen," says Leon Burton of the University of Hawaii. ■

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comprehensive math program would you have, and what would you expect students to know by the end of the 6th grade?" asks Hunter March, associate professor of music education at the University of Texas and chair of MENC's Society for General Music.

Especially at the secondary level, music educators also must fight the perception that their programs are designed more to entertain than to educate, a byproduct of the pressure to perform publicly. Though outside forces have doubtless influenced this dilemma, numerous music educators admit that the field must share the blame for



Casey Sheldon



Ann Bradford

sending the wrong message. An overemphasis on rehearsals and performances, fundraising drives and group trips to Disney World, the expanded number of performance groups and the opening up of musical repertoires beyond those considered traditional or classic, and the failure to attract the general student—all have contributed to a view of secondary music as more an activity than a basic subject.

Hoffer points out that music professionals strongly support the cultural and artistic outcomes of the discipline in making a case for enriching its position in the core curriculum. But those are sometimes being sacrificed to a beefed-up performance schedule filled by a dizzying array of school music groups. "In too many situations, especially at the secondary school level, the impression can be easily gained that the purpose of music in the schools is



John Freulich

to provide pleasant activities for the students and entertainment for the community," Hoffer cautions.

While acknowledging the important contributions of performing groups such as band, orchestra, chorus, and other ensembles, many leading music educators worry that the pressure of rehearsing for frequent performances and (in some cases) competitions can divert attention from producing

"There is a musical and artistic heritage that we need to pass along. It's not an entertainment heritage."

—Donald Corbett, on the pressure to perform

educational outcomes. Because enrollments in performance classes far outdistance those for nonperformance courses, an opportunity to produce more well-rounded music students is lost, they argue.

Moreover, the fact that rehearsals and performances frequently occur outside class time may undermine music's position as a curricular basic. "As music educators, we are constantly waging a battle to convince others that music is part of the curriculum," asserts Judith Delzell of Ohio State University. "Yet, when we have a heavy schedule of extracurricular activities, we imply that the music program is indeed extracurricular."

"There is a musical and artistic heritage that we need to pass along," Corbett concludes. "It's not an entertainment heritage."

'Beyond Performance'

The questions raised about the emphasis on music performance parallel a debate in the arts field generally. The Getty Center for Education in the Arts, for example, has been influential in vigorously fighting the notion that arts study need only focus on what students can "produce" or perform. The National Endowment for the Arts outlined a similar thesis in *Toward Civilization*, its 1988 report mandated by Congress. And former Education Secretary William Bennett, in *James Madison High School*, his 1987 report outlining his views on the secondary core curriculum, advocated a music program for all students strongly grounded in the historical and cultural roots of music.

Such views have provoked sharp debate within the music education field. Many educators say that well-managed performance groups accomplish such objectives; others argue that

emphasizing history, for example, might drive students away from both performance groups and the music electives needed to attract general students.

"The last thing that's going to turn on the students we're trying to reach is a [music history] course that starts with the Middle Ages and ends in the 19th century," warns March.

"We need to question some of the assumptions underlying the 'beyond performance' movement," says Robert Cutietta, coordinator of music education at Kent State University. While lectures about music history are probably out of place in band, orchestra, or choral courses, these classrooms do offer a chance to help students analyze and critique their own performances, thereby enriching their command of critical listening, he points

out. Another way of expanding the performance group is suggested by a recent high school group's spring concert that Cutietta attended. A different student preceded each selection by explaining to the audience what the group tried to achieve in performing each piece.

"Students in performing groups should learn the historical and theoretical bases of the repertoire they perform," concludes Paul Lehman, senior associate dean of the school of music at the University of Michigan. "All courses in music," including the traditional performance classes and general music offerings for the nonperformers, "need to do that to some extent. But when kids study band, they're doing it to play an instrument."

Continued on next page



Jack Messler

Role of Contemporary Music Questioned

English has its skirmishes between proponents of the "classics" and those pushing "motivational" literature. Social studies educators have collided over the relative merits of historical study and current topics.

In music, some experts say, a similar battle is being waged over the extent to which performance groups and general music classes should study and perform jazz, blues, rock, and other contemporary genres. The popularity of such styles has led to an expansion of jazz ensembles, swing bands, and specialized vocal groups; and general music courses frequently stress contemporary music in an effort to lure students into the electives.

"There is good music in all genres," asserts Hunter March, chair of the Society for General Music of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC). The Beatles, for example, were snubbed by academicians during the pop group's reign in the 1960s—but musicologists are now beginning to discover "how sophisticated" their music is, March says. "We need to help students find what's good" about a particular piece within a genre and teach them to use that knowledge in expanding their tastes.

"I think the idea that kids should study classical compositions . . . exclusively is almost nonexistent now,"

adds Paul Lehman of the University of Michigan. "Music teachers teach a wide array of music," Lehman admits, however, that while exploring contemporary styles is a valid way to "get kids interested in music, . . . you can quickly run out" of serious lessons from it.

Several educators who asked for anonymity are even more skeptical. Some school performing groups, dressed in slinky outfits and crooning the hits, would seem more at home in a Las Vegas show than in a concert hall, one educator complained. Another said if motivating students with a

contemporary songlist was a goal, "I don't think 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon' or 'Feelings' is going to cut it."

"Our students do not need help in learning popular music," chimes Donald Corbett, a music professor at Wichita State University. "I do not mean that music in schools should only consist of masterpieces, but I urge that we go beyond immediately understandable musics, like folk songs, jazz, and show tunes, to experience the masterpieces of our culture as well." ■



Simeon Montesa

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General Music

Deciding the role that performance, music criticism, history, aesthetics, and other topics should play in the music curriculum is equally important outside the traditional performance groups. Although band, orchestra, and chorus groups serve the majority of secondary students who take music, numerous music educators stress that more needs to be done to provide some comprehensive framework of music instruction for the general student.

Whether students elect a music course to fill one of the new fine arts requirements, experts say, largely depends on the field's success in reaching out to students who may want to learn about music, but not necessarily join a performance group. "More kids might be taking [music], but what do you teach them?" asks John Mahlmann, MENC executive director. "You can't give a trumpet to everybody."

The answer, some music educators believe, lies in initiating or expanding a diverse range of general music courses at the secondary level that capitalize on adolescents' natural interest in music without requiring the time commitment of performance groups.

"The goal should always be [students who are] musically educated, whether they're in a performance group or not," says Leon Burton, an education professor at the University of Hawaii and former president of the island's ASCD affiliate. He adds that, while 85 percent of secondary students are not currently enrolled in a music course, "there's more attention being given to that 85 percent [today] than at any time in the history of music education."

The payoff from this interest is a modest number of unique general music courses aimed at broad student outcomes (see examples, p. 7). March says that what unifies the diverse array of general music offerings is a way of



Courtesy of Music Educators National Conference



Ann Bradford

The electronic keyboard, inexpensive and therefore accessible to more students, is a welcome addition to the piano.

teaching rather than a common course of study. General music teachers, he says, use a variety of methods to motivate students of differing skills and interests to build musical understanding through such activities as "listening, performing, analyzing, and creating." Teachers also attempt to help students "realize that basic music elements are present in all styles and genres and exist in music of all cultures and historical periods."

One trend having its greatest impact on general classes is the growth in the applications of such technologies as personal computers, synthesizers, and electronic keyboards to composing and producing music. Formerly, March notes, "general music used singing as its only performance medium." The low cost of keyboards, however, has increased their popularity and availability.

Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) technology, for example, standardizes the output from various

musical instruments so that the computer can record, notate, and play it back. This has considerably enhanced the ability of students, particularly general students, to compose music, says Sandy Feldstein, former president of the Music Industry Conference and currently president and CEO of CPP/Belwin, a print music publisher. "This means that a student can compose music in four or five parts by putting in one line" and adding extra parts. Further, MIDI can be used with many of the personal computers schools previously have bought for other subjects, he says.

Some guidance on how to build general music offerings may come from a recommended course of study for general music expected to be issued this fall by MENC. Part of a project that will suggest courses of study in the areas of band, orchestra, choral, and general music, the guide will give direction to teachers by suggesting sample objectives in general music K-12, according to Linda Mercer of the Ohio education department, who is coordinating the general music task group's effort.

One challenge in developing general music courses will be finding and training teachers for them. Music educators typically are trained with an eye toward helping students learn to play an instrument and perform. And some are wary of teaching general

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General Music Courses Offer Diversity

By Scott Willis

Four selected general music courses highlight very different approaches to providing music learnings for all students.

The Great Works

Students taking Music Perspectives, a course offered in Baltimore County (Md.) high schools, study music from around the world and concert pieces from Bach to Bernstein. All high school students who do not elect chorus, band, or orchestra take the course.

Music Perspectives begins with roughly four weeks devoted to "music of the world's cultures," including music of Africa, India, and the Orient, as well as a variety of folk music. Then follow six units on Western art music, from the Baroque era to the present.

The course emphasizes music history and appreciation. "Every student should have some exposure" to great works of music, says Rebecca Silverstein, who teaches the course at Woodlawn High School. By studying pieces such as Handel's *Messiah* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, students learn about tone color, melody, harmony, rhythm, and polyrhythm. They also learn about the cultural contexts in which the works were created.

To keep students motivated, the course uses participatory activities. "We try to make it as active a course as possible," says James Wharton, who teaches Music Perspectives at Catonsville High School. For example, students act out the first scene of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in a translated, updated version before listening to the same scene in the opera.

The course is "going over very well," says Silverstein. While about half of her students, she estimates, are resistant to the musical selections at first hearing, end-of-course comments indicate that many of these students broaden their tastes.

Contact: Rebecca Silverstein or James Wharton, Baltimore County Public Schools, 6901 N. Charles St., Towson, MD 21204.

Basic Music Skills

Music in Our Lives "gives students an avocation" by teaching them to play guitar, keyboard, or recorder, says Ann Trombley, who teaches the course at Monticello High School in Monticello, N.Y. Approximately half the school's students take the course.

Music in Our Lives emphasizes playing and composing music, although Trombley gives basic information about the historical and social dimensions of pieces she introduces to the class. The course includes listening, performing, composing, and evaluation activities to give students a wide range of experiences.

Trombley's students may not become proficient enough on their instruments to perform publicly, but they do develop basic music skills they can build on throughout their lives. "I put the emphasis on process," Trombley says.

Besides learning to play, students compose an original blues piece over the course of the year, so they have a "finished product" when the course ends. They also do special projects on topics of their choice and keep journals of their progress.

"Students are very positive" about the course, Trombley says. "They take pride in playing an instrument, and they like to hear their music performed." Many students wish to continue their musical studies, she adds. "They ask me if there's a second class they can take."

Contact: Ann Trombley, Monticello High School, Port Jervis Rd., Monticello, NY 12701.

Computers and Rock

Students in Music Lab, offered at Shoreham-Wading River High School in Shoreham, N.Y., use computer music systems to create compositions in rock and top-40 music styles. About 12 percent of the school's students take the course.

Students who are interested only in contemporary music get "locked out" of traditional music courses, says Tony Messina, who teaches Music Lab. "I pick up the rockers."

In a dramatic departure from the "conservatory model" of teaching music, Messina's students work with computers, synthesizers, sequencers, and drum machines. They also learn to compose using this equipment—without first learning traditional music theory and composition techniques.

Messina requires his students to keep music journals, in which they write music and describe their reactions to music they hear. He tries to help his students become "more selective" in their musical tastes and stresses tolerance of others' preferences.

Some Music Lab students may parlay their new knowledge of audiot technology into jobs in radio, television, or film. "I'm pushing [my students] to make serious job and career choices," Messina emphasizes.

While some parents only tolerate his efforts, Messina says, other parents are supportive. The students in Music Lab, he adds, love the course. In fact, many more students wish to take the course than can be accommodated.

Contact: Tony Messina, Shoreham-Wading River High School, P.O. Box 337, Shoreham, NY 11786.

A Cultural Blend

At Leon High School in Tallahassee, Fla., students who take Selected Musics of the Western Hemisphere study the musics and cultures of the United States, the Caribbean, and South America, and the role of African influences on them. "I'm trying to make music education relevant to all cultural segments of the school population," says Nancy Marsters, who teaches the course.

Through lectures, listening, and hands-on activities, Marsters' students learn how the fusion of three major cultures—African, Native American, and European—has given birth to the varied musical styles of the Americas. "All of it is a mix," she emphasizes.

In the course, students learn to recognize different instruments and styles, and to "listen with their brains," says Marsters. Students also learn about the peoples who made the music. "There is no way to understand the music without understanding the culture and the times" that produced it, Marsters explains. At the end of the course, students do research on music they like and then make presentations to the class.

Selected Musics of the Western Hemisphere capitalizes on the liking most students have for blues and reggae, but also expands their experiences and tastes. For example, many students develop "a great love of the music of the Indian peoples," says Marsters.

Contact: Nancy Marsters, Leon High School, 550 E. Tennessee St., Tallahassee, FL 32308.

Source: *Promising Practices: High School General Music*, Music Educators National Conference, 1902 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091; \$14.00 prepaid (\$11.20 for MENC members).

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music students, who may be less motivated or musically talented. "Finding ways to teach the general student, for teachers who've been prepared to do something else, is a real challenge," says Mary Palmer, a music education professor at the University of Central Florida. "For some people, it may not be as satisfying and rewarding."

Despite a growth in interest in secondary general music offerings among educators, only 2 percent of high school students ever enroll in a nonperformance course—and some of these are students also taking performance courses. Some educators

complain that an opportunity to capitalize on new arts requirements is being squandered. "Everybody in music fought for those [fine arts] requirements," says Burton. "But once they were there, the band director said: 'I'm not going to teach that group.'"

An Uphill Battle?

Music educators are going to have to better resolve such issues, most experts agree, to strengthen the field's place in the curriculum. Approaches to teacher training, curriculum development, and the policy arena need to be enhanced; progress in these areas will help determine if music is

seen as a frill or a basic.

But while music may seem to be fighting an uphill battle compared with the support given disciplines viewed as more "practical" (for example, math and science), the ability of the arts to foster the human side of learning will always be in demand.

Lehman quotes John Naisbitt, who points out that every new technology ("high tech") introduced into society must be counterbalanced with a humanizing influence ("high touch"). "As society is increasingly overwhelmed by technology," Lehman asserts, "we feel an even greater need to express ourselves." Music, he says, is an ideal means for expression through participation. *♪*

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